2. INTRODUCTION

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

The Acadiana Bays, located in central coastal Louisiana, comprise Four League, Atchafalaya, East Cote Blanche, West Cote Blanche, and Vermilion Bays (Figure 2-1). These bays have experienced dramatic changes over the last 60 years (Coastal Environments, 1977). For example, Atchafalaya Bay, the fastest growing river delta area in the United States, historically contained the largest concentration of oyster reefs in the United States. However, a number of human activities — most notably dredging between 1930 and 1990 — largely destroyed these reefs. These reefs had reportedly helped control the salinity in the Acadiana Bays by acting as baffles between the Gulf of Mexico and Atchafalaya Bay and between Atchafalaya Bay and the Cote Blanche Bays. In addition, in the 1930s and 1940s, modifications to the Mississippi River at Old River diverted flow to the Atchafalaya River, and construction of the Wax Lake Outlet directed more fresh water to the bay system (Coastal Environments, 1977). The combination of these latter actions decreased salinity in this historically brackish estuarine habitat. This change in the natural ecosystem of the bays has severely decreased the historically prolific oyster population.

The Acadiana Bays Reef Restoration Feasibility Study was intended to evaluate the potential for restoring, to the extent practicable, the Acadiana Bays to their former condition by reestablishing these historic reefs either at their former location or alternate locations. This study applied hydrodynamic models to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative configurations and design approaches towards re-establishing the reefs. This document reports on those work items.

2.2 Study Goals

The primary goal of this study was to determine the feasibility of restoring the Acadiana Bays estuary to at or near its historical condition by construction of artificial reefs. More specifically, the primary project objective was to examine the potential for reef restoration to influence salinities and turbidities in the Acadiana Bays System. A

secondary project objective was to evaluate whether reef restoration could improve storm protection to the marshes and upland shorelines north of the western bays.

The bulk of the study effort was devoted to the development of calibrated hydrodynamic models to allow the assessment of different reef configurations and locations on changes in estuary parameters. A bathymetric surveying task was performed to determine the present relative bathymetry in the bays paying particular attention to the location where a reconstructed reef would most likely be placed, i.e., between Point Chevreuil and Marsh Island. It was determined that reef locations east of Point Chevreuil would not be feasible due to the present large fresh water input through the Atchafalaya River and Wax Lake Outlet. Relatively limited study funds precluded a detailed assessment of either existing geotechnical conditions in the area or development of optimized reef sections. The study team felt that these areas of design effort would be conducted later in the project development program if the modeling exercises indicated that study objectives could be met.

Various artificial reef configurations (alternatives) were evaluated to examine their effectiveness in achieving project objectives. In this regards, the numerical modeling phase of the study established: 1) baseline wave conditions, hydrodynamics, salinity regimes, and turbidity in the Acadiana Bays region; and 2) changes in these parameters due to proposed alternative configurations and locations of reef structures.

The final alternate reef locations evaluated in this study are shown in Figure 2-2. Some alignments had sub-alternates generally consisting of different reef crest heights and/or segmented construction.

Other components of the study included an evaluation of likely bearing strengths of the area's bay sediments which were factored into the calculation of likely construction costs of the various alternates. In addition, the reef's influence on salinity and turbidity levels were used in a biological assessment of whether alternates would offer the potential of creating a habitat promoting colonization by desired marine species.

2.3 Project Study Team

The team of contractors that conducted this feasibility study consisted of Waldemar S. Nelson & Co., Inc. (NELSON) as the prime contractor and Taylor Engineering, Inc. (modeling), John Chance Land Surveys, Inc. (surveying – topographic and bathymetric), Louire Consultants (geotechnical) and the LSU Coastal Studies Institute (meteorological/oceanographic data collection and analysis).

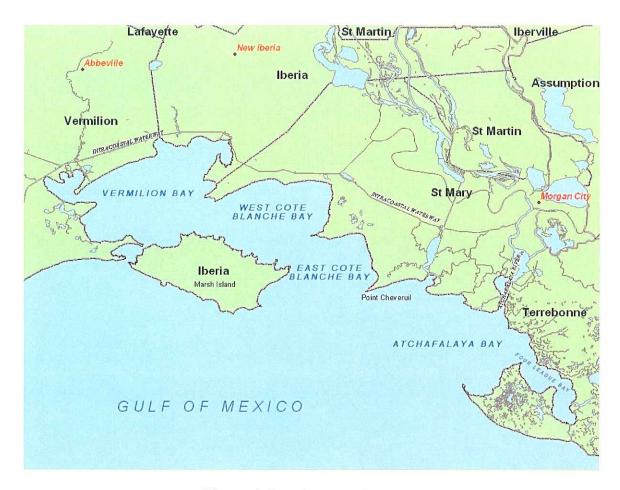
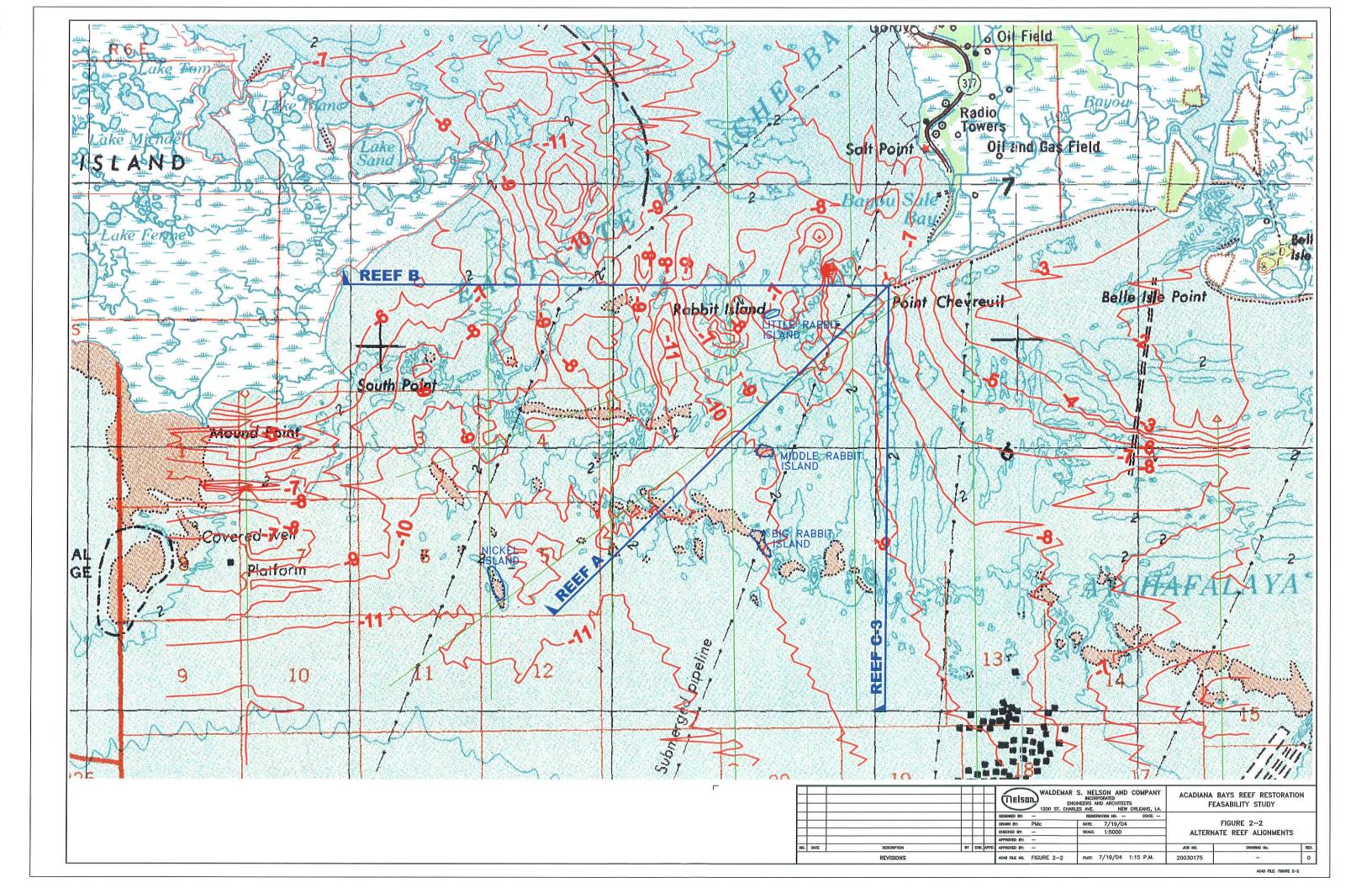


Figure 2-1 Project Location Map

2.4 Project Outreach Program

The project kick-off meeting was held at the offices of LDNR on July 21, 2003. At that meeting the project's plan of work, schedule, and general approach were discussed. Minutes were prepared and distributed to participants. The first public outreach project meeting held after contract award was convened in New Iberia on



September 3, 2003. Attendance of interested groups and individuals was high with very good exchange of information. Documentation of that public meeting was prepared and distributed to project team members. Another meeting with the general public occurred at the conclusion of the study and was convened as an Open House Forum in Lafayette on October 17, 2006.

In addition to these general public meetings there were two other meetings attended mostly by representatives of the Acadiana Bays Association. These meetings occurred on September 27, 2004 and April 17, 2006. More information on the public outreach program for the project can be seen in Appendix F.